

# Reparations

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Satsuki's work is interrupted one day by a simple question: "Do you know of a Ryuko Matoi?"

Status: ongoing

Published: 2020-04-01

Words: 9926

Original source: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/23433847>

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# Reparations

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# Chapter 1

“Lady Satsuki, do you know of a Ryuko Matoi?”

Satsuki looked up from the laptop set before her to gaze over at Inmouta who watches her from behind his glasses. It takes her a moment to register the question at all, up until that point they had been sitting in companionable silence for quite some time and the sudden voice across from her had jarred her from her concentration. She regarded him for a moment before giving a faint shake of her head.

“No,” She said, and after a moment of thought added: “What prompted this question?”

“Well I was looking through your mother's personal finances and--” As he had spoke his eyes flicked down to his computer for a moment, and then back up to her. He must have seen her displeasure in her face as he stopped talking immediately and her keen eyes saw his throat bob as he swallowed. Satsuki took in a slow, calming breath and reached for her now cold tea. On one hand she couldn't blame Inmouta, not entirely anyway. He was a hacker after all and was always sorely tempted to test out and hone his skills when the need struck him, and the Kiryuin's only dealt with the best when it came to securities. Honestly it was probably only a matter of time before he attempted to break into their bank accounts just to prove he could, but he certainly knew better then to attempt to steal anything. If Ragyo had found out, she'd probably personally see to it he could never so much as look at a computer ever again, let alone use one. On the other hand, he should have known better. It was their involvement in his court case so many years ago that not only kept him out of jail but nailed him a job at their company to ensure that their networks were secure. She suspected that he might have found this to be boring at times, but Ragyo had been very clear when she had hired him; he only had one chance. ‘Don't screw this up’ had been her exact words. Tempting fate wasn't even close to

what he was doing, he might as well have put a neon sign over his head.

“You broke into my mother's personal finances?” She asked coolly, keeping her voice low so as not to be overheard. Inmouta met her gaze for a moment before looking down at his hands sheepishly.

“Yes ma'am... I wanted to ensure that your accounts were in good hands,” He offered lamely, “The security is quite good. It could use some work, however.”

Satsuki took another breath and drained the last of her tea, setting the paper cup down. It was nowhere near as good as Soroi's, but she wasn't one to complain.

“And while you were ensuring our financial security you found mention of a...” She trailed off. Inmouta, sensing her prompting perked back up and looked at his computer screen.

“A one Ryuko Matoi,” He said, typing briefly before reaching for the small wireless mouse next to his laptop.

“The name is not familiar to me,” Satsuki said, looking back to her own screen where she had been drafting an email, “Probably one of mothers business contacts.”

“Very possibly,” Inmouta said, “It's just strange, there are a number of withdrawals from Lady Ragyo's account for this Matoi like clockwork every month dating back over twenty years.”

This new bit of information prompts Satsuki's attention again and she gazed at Inmouta. Twenty years? True Ragyo had been an employee of Revocs for longer than that, but surely Satsuki would have been aware of an employee by that name, especially one that prompted Ragyo to use her personal finances for payment rather than business finances.

“Interesting...” She hummed, “You have my curiosity peaked. See what you can find of this Matoi. Oh and Inmouta?” She waited until his eyes met hers “Never again. Are we clear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

After that they fell back into a comfortable silence as each went about their work. Every so often Inmouta would hum or scoff as his fingers danced across the keyboard, but Satsuki had become skilled and tuning him out. It had been Satsuki who had convinced her mother to hire Inmouta when his arrest had made headlines and she suspected that he knew it as he was always very faithful to her even, she suspected, more so than her mother. She wasn’t sure if what they had qualified as a real friendship or a close working relationship, but still she was thankful for his presence during times like these when her work seemed to drone on. It made it feel a little less lonely.

After about an hour had passed, Satsuki sighed and checked the clock in the lower corner of her computer screen. Satisfied that she had worked enough, she stretched and twisted her neck until a satisfying crack sounded, then leaned back in her chair.

“I think that’s enough for today, Inmouta,” She said as she saved her progress and shut her laptop, reaching for the bag that was leaning against her chair.

“Of course, ma’am,” He said, “Would you like to see what I’ve found of Ms. Matoi?”

Satsuki wasn’t surprised that he had already found information on their mysterious Matoi, rather she was more surprised he had not spoken up sooner. She sat back up and slid her laptop into its bag before nodding to him. When Inmouta turned his laptop to face her, Satsuki frowned. The person looking back at her was certainly not what she had expected. In her mind she had pictured someone of middle age in business attire, instead a young blue-eyed woman in a

tank top with black and red two-toned hair and a split lip was glaring at her from within what looked like an arrest record.

“This is Ryuko Matoi?” Satsuki asked, puzzlement clear in her voice, “Mothers Ryuko Matoi?”

“I would bet money on it, ma’am,” Inmouta said with a nod.

“She doesn’t look much older then twenty herself,” Satsuki observed.

“She’s twenty-two, actually,” Inmouta said, “She has an impressive record, as you can see, dating back nearly a decade; truancy, delinquency, petty theft, fighting, drunk-in-public, mostly minor violations that date back to about what I would assume to be middle school age. Academically there’s nothing special about her. Her grades were below average until she seems to have eventually dropped out sometime in high school.

“She first appears mentioned in the records of an orphanage across the country and from there I’ve run across some hospital records, police records, and most interestingly her bank account.” He reached over the screen to tap at a couple of buttons and the image of the glaring girl was quickly changed with a familiar banking website. “She uses the same bank that you and your family uses. Not only that, but as you can see, there are Lady Ragyo’s deposits.”

Satsuki was not one to believe in coincidence, especially not when there was so much evidence to the contrary sitting across from her. She took Inmouta’s word that the large deposits she saw in the string of bank activity were her mothers as they were only identified by what she assumed to be a code that linked to Ragyo’s account. Alongside those were withdrawals in red and more deposits in smaller amounts.

“What about these?” Satsuki said, pointing to one of them, “What are these from?”

“Those are direct deposits from an auto garage a couple towns over. I assume that’s where she works and lives now,” Inmouta said. Satsuki leaned back in her seat and folded her arms as she worked at digesting this information.

“How old is this account, Inmouta?” She asked as he turned the laptop to face him again.

“Twenty-two years,” He said, “Her first withdrawal was six years ago, by a very large amount. After that it seems like someone had put a restriction on how much she could withdraw at one time.”

Satsuki did not like the implications of this. Ragyo Kiryuin starts up a bank account, deposits large sums of money into it for an orphan girl all the way across the country and keeps it secret for twenty years? For what reason could anyone possibly have to do that?

“You said she was an orphan. Are there any records of her parents?”

“None. It seems she was abandoned.”

Abandoned. Twenty-two years. Orphan. Satsuki’s index finger drummed a tattoo against her arm as something settled somewhere in her gut. She herself had only been a baby when her father died. She had no memories of him, and as she thought about it, she had a sneaking suspicion that if she were to ask how long it would be now since the anniversary of his death, the answer would be twenty-two years.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Inmouta. Send me a copy of your findings if you would.”

“Of course, my lady.”

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The rest of the day passed without incident as it always did. Soroi drove her home to the Kiryuin estate as thoughts of her mother and this Ryuko Matoi tumbled around in her head. She made her way to

her private study, thankful that her half-sister Nui seemed to be distracted by a rather loud phone call in another room, and settled at her desk. Soroi brought her tea as she reviewed emails, business reports, and upcoming events in her calendar before finally settling in a lounge chair to read. Before she even realized it a knocking had come to her door to announce that dinner was being served.

She took her time placing her bookmark and setting her novel aside. Dinner was one of the few times Satsuki ever saw Ragyo outside of work activities. Usually they were so busy with their own work, they did little more than pass each other in the hallway, and neither seemed willing to put up the effort to connect more than that. There was some resentment there to be sure, but it wasn't like Satsuki and Ragyo disliked each other. Ragyo had always been busy, and likewise had encouraged Satsuki and Nui to work hard themselves in their endeavors. Ever since she had been a girl, Satsuki had known she was being groomed to take over Revocs when Ragyo eventually stepped down. As such Ragyo had been extremely strict when it came to her education and training. Nui, on the other hand, had been given a bit more leeway, still expected to work for the company, but with far less expectation of responsibility as Satsuki, and the girl had found her calling in fashion and the promise of eventual employment in Revocs fashion industry following successful graduation from college.

Now, as she made her way to the family's private dining room, Satsuki found herself thinking back on her history with her mother, trying to come up with anything that might not have seemed so out of the ordinary during her time as a child. Satsuki's father had died about a year after she herself was born, after which Satsuki and Ragyo had been alone until about the time she was four when Ragyo had remarried and Nui was born shortly afterwards. Some years after that was the divorce, and since then it had only been the three of them. Nui would regularly leave to visit her father, and very occasionally Ragyo would become enamored with some person or another but never anyone long term. As Satsuki thought of all the incidents other people had come into their lives, all the major events



that had taken place, she could not think of anytime that Ragyo had ever hinted at Ryuko Matoi. It made things slightly more difficult, but she was resolved to probe her mother for some answers anyway.

The family dining room was smaller than the grand hall, but still quite large with an arched ceiling from which hang a chandelier. The center of the room was dominated by a rectangular table on top of which a white cloth was draped across its expanse and further weighed down by silver and glass candle holders and a couple of vases. All told there was enough room for eight people, but only place settings for three, one at the end and the others on either side of that. Around the table were cupboards that held china and crystalware, the entire west wall was taken up by floor to ceiling windows that looked out at the garden, only interrupted by a fireplace that sat cold and empty. There were three entrances into the room, the main one which faced south and opened up directly into the main hallway, and two others on the east facing wall, one which led to the kitchen and the other which Satsuki entered.

Ragyo and Nui were in conversation about Nui's efforts in school when Satsuki came in. Ragyo spared her a glance but little more as Satsuki made her way to her seat and allowed Soroi to scoot her chair in. Wine was offered, and Satsuki hesitated before accepting a glass hoping it could steel her resolve somewhat. Nui didn't finish her talking until soup was brought out and placed before them, the three of them eating in silence for a few minutes.

"How was your day, Satsuki?" Ragyo asked, glancing again to her eldest daughter. Satsuki took a sip of wine to formulate her response.

"It went about as well as expected, mother," she said at last, stirring what remained of her soup with her spoon. Satsuki did not like how this new secret made her paranoid. She felt Ragyo's eyes on her, calculating as always.

"But..." Ragyo prompted.

“Nothing important really,” Satsuki shrugged nonchalantly, pausing as servants entered the room with the main course which traded places with the soup bowls, “Gamagoori and I were talking today--you know, head of security?” She paused to allow her mother to give an absent nod, “He was telling me of how he had some engine trouble over the weekend while he was visiting friends. He was apparently very impressed with a mechanic that serviced his car, someone by the name of...” Satsuki paused as if trying to remember. “Matoi. Ryuko Matoi.”

Never in Satsuki’s life had she ever seen anything grind Ragyo to a dead stop like she did at that moment. It was only for a few moments, but for the selfsure and confident Ragyo Kiryuin it might as well have been hours of stillness. Even Nui had noticed it and she hadn’t been looking for it, sparing Satsuki a glance that was both questioning and worried.

“Is that a fact?” Ragyo asked finally in a tone that would have been casual if not for her fixation on her own plate as she ate. Satsuki nodded, that feeling in her gut was back again and now it was twofold.

“He had nothing but high praise for her,” Satsuki continued, watching her mother from the corner of her eye, “He even encouraged me to bring my sedan down and have it looked at.”

“I see. Surely there are mechanics closer than that.”

Satsuki let her mother's words hang in the air for a moment before responding, “I don’t recall mentioning it to be far away.”

Ragyo looked up and met Satsuki’s gaze then and understanding passed between them. Both their expressions were trained to be placid and calm, but in her eyes Satsuki saw a whirlwind of emotions pass by, imperceptible to anyone except those who knew her but all the same, before her mother could collect herself Satsuki saw the guilt and fear in her eyes. Ragyo knew that Satsuki had caught her, and as the silence stretched on, Satsuki wordlessly prompted her to

come clean. Ragyo set down her knife and reached for her wine, taking a deep swallow.

“Mama?” Nui asked, her voice quiet though it seemed to shake Ragyo loose of her reverie.

“I must have assumed the distance, I suppose,” She said, giving a thin smile as she set her glass down and picked her knife back up. Satsuki brows came together. “Well if she’s so close and so highly recommended, maybe it’s for the best, hm?”

“Mother--”

“Now, now girls, enough talk,” Ragyo said, shooting Satsuki a severe look that even now brought her to silence, “The cooks worked hard on this meal and we don’t want it to go cold, do we?”

The rest of the meal passed without a word, the only sound being the clink of silverware. Ragyo eventually excused herself, leaving her meal half eaten and her wine glass empty. Both her daughters watched her go until she turned a corner and disappeared.

“What was that about?” Nui asked, looking across the table to Satsuki as servants reappeared to take their mothers plate.

“It was nothing. Don’t worry about it,” Satsuki said as she dabbed at her mouth with her napkin and picked up her own nearly-empty wine glass.

“Oh don’t give me that!” She hissed, “You said something that upset her.”

“She has no one to blame but herself,” Satsuki mumbled into her glass before draining the rest of her wine. It was dry and had started a warmth in her stomach.

“No secrets, remember?” Nui was pouting now and Satsuki spared her a glance and a resigned sigh. To say the sisters were at odds

was putting it mildly. There were large swaths of their history where neither got along with the other. Pair their years apart, different paternity, and each of them attempting to garner attention from a mother who spent most of her time with her company rather than her daughters, and it was not surprising to find that they had frequently come to blows in their younger years. Both being trained in martial arts had not helped in matters either. Their fighting had culminated in one traumatic day in which Satsuki had nearly gouged out her sisters left eye, and even now there was a scar bisecting Nui's eyebrow that served as a reminder of that scuffle. It was one of the few times Ragyo had ever struck Satsuki. Afterwards, when Nui was given stitches and allowed to come home, they had come to an agreement of sorts: no more fighting, no more lies. They would try to be good sisters, and despite their continued sibling rivalry, they had managed to stick to those rules.

Satsuki set down her wine glass and set her napkin on top of what was left on her plate before standing. "When you're finished, come to my office." Nui looked like she wanted to complain, but Satsuki left before she could, leaving her alone in the dining room.

She didn't have to wait long. Some time after Satsuki had returned to her study, a knock came at her door. When she beckoned them to answer, Nui stepped in and closed the door behind her and walked further into the room before folding her arms across her chest and waiting expectantly. Satsuki was back in her chair, her legs crossed and a thoughtful silence passed between them before Nui got impatient.

"Well? Are you going to tell me what happened at dinner?"

When Satsuki didn't immediately answer Nui looked like she was going to start complaining again. She silenced her with a motion before reaching to the table beside her where her phone was resting on top of her book.

"I was looking through some old records and I came across something interesting. A name that kept popping up: Ryuko Matoi,"

Satsuki said. It was still a lie, but she was not going to tell Nui how she had actually got the information. She was absolutely sure the blonde would turn Inmouta over to her mother if she did.

Nui frowned, "The mechanic you mentioned. So?"

"So, mother's been sending her payments for over twenty years."

"Alright..."

"Ryuko Matoi is twenty-two years old."

Nui frowned, at first not comprehending. It takes her longer then it took Satsuki before it seems to dawn on her and the look she gives Satsuki might as well have been a prime example of how 'confusion' is generally expressed with only facial muscles. Satsuki then offered out her phone.

"Notice anything about this woman? Imagine she straightened her hair."

Nui approaches closer and takes the phone, looking at the image on the screen. It's the same arrest record that Satsuki had been shown earlier that day. Again it takes her a moment, Satsuki expects Nui had been about to ask what she was expected to see when she looked up, but then realization sets in and she looks back to the picture, then up again.

"It's uncanny isn't it?" Satsuki asks quietly.

"She looks like you," Nui's voice was just as soft. Satsuki nods. There's a long stretch of silence as Nui looks at the glaring figure in the phone before moving to sit at the end of the lounge. Satsuki makes space for her and soon the sisters are sitting side by side, looking at the picture.

"It could be a coincidence," Nui offers, "That happens sometimes, right? Identical strangers?"

“Same blue eyes, same dark hair. Almost the same height too. Same country.” Satsuki says, “And even so, if we’re strangers, why would Ragyo send her payments?”

“So I mean, what? Mom has a secret love child or something?”

Satsuki shook her head, “Unlikely. We’re too similar for that. It seems more likely that our parents are genetically the same. The dates almost match up too.”

“With the car crash? But that doesn’t make sense, if she’s our sister, why don’t we know about it? Why isn’t she here?”

“‘Why’ indeed,” Satsuki hums. She watched as Nui zoomed in on Ryuko’s face.

“Well... I mean she has your frown,” Nui offered with a smile. Satsuki shot her a look and soon the blonde was grinning, “Yeah, that’s the one.”

Satsuki took her phone back and set it aside as Nui gave a titter of amusement. “Come on, I’m just teasing you, lighten up.”

Silence passes between them as Satsuki lets Nui process what she had shared with her.

“So what do we do?” She finally asks, looking to Satsuki.

“We?”

“Oh come on! She’s possibly our sister and you’re just gonna cut me out?”

“I honestly didn’t think you should get involved, you have enough to worry about right now with school.”

“Bullshit!”

“Watch your mouth.”

They were glaring at each other now, both biting back words that they would regret later. In unison, the two of them took in slow breaths, hold them, and let them out. Another beat of silence passed.

“What do we do now?” Nui said again, more firmly this time. Satsuki sighed.

“I’ve been thinking about that myself,” She admits, “Do we go see her? Do we confront mother, or do we let her come to us with answers?”

“We should go see her!” Nui bristles with excitement at the notion.

“That might not be a good idea,” Satsuki’s tone is soft, placating, “Ryuko Matoi seems to have struggled a great deal in her life, she might not be very keen on meeting us at all.”

“Or she might be happy to learn about us,” Nui countered, “What if she’s been looking for us all this time?”

Satsuki frowns and wants to comment on her sisters penchant for fantasy but lets it go. “We don’t have enough solid proof to go on, only speculation,” She hopes she says it with enough finality, “I think the best course of action right now is to do nothing and watch to see what happens. Mother knows I’m aware of Ryuko Matoi now, she’ll have to come forward eventually.”

“‘Eventually’ can be a long time, Suki,” Nui grumbles, “Especially with mama.”

Satsuki pauses, “We give her three months, then we approach her.”

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It takes a lot of doing to eventually get Nui to promise not to go to Ragyo with what she was told, but eventually Satsuki wrenches as much of a sincere promise of quiet as she can from her sister. For Nui three months is a long time, especially with the information she had been given, but Satsuki is satisfied when only a few days after

their talk that Nui is back to being enthralled by her own affairs. The subject of Ryuko Matoi doesn't come up again during family dinners, and Satsuki suspects that her mother is avoiding her. Eventually the first month passes without incident. Inmouta turns up no new information about Ryuko Matoi and Satsuki eventually encourages him to pursue different interests than her family. He takes the hint, but Inmouta is never one to turn away from something that catches his interest. If he digs anymore, he doesn't tell her about it.

It's two weeks into the second month when Satsuki is on an elevator heading down to the main lobby of Revocs. Behind her and to the side is Gamagoori, the hulking man currently telling her about updates to security that had recently been implemented across the company. He was another employee that Satsuki had personally seen to getting hired by her mother. A few years her senior, Gamagoori had come with shining recommendations and a loyalty so fierce as to be nearly suffocating, but Satsuki felt at ease around him.

The elevator opened and they both stepped out, turning in unison to head to the parking garage when a voice caught Satsuki's attention.

"Look, I just need to deliver something to Ragyo Kiryuin, then I'm gone," The mention of her mother brought Satsuki's gaze to the front desk. Gamagoori nearly ran into her when she abruptly stopped walking.

"I'm sorry, miss, but Lady Ragyo is in meetings the rest of the day," The clerk at the front said in a tone that was somehow both compromising and brusque, "But if you leave it here I can make sure it gets to her."

"No way, I need to make sure it gets directly in her hands," Satsuki's lungs are burning before she realizes she was holding her breath. She lets it out slowly as she quickly came to terms with the fact that Ryuko Matoi was standing right there in the lobby of her company. She looks exactly like she did in the arrest record picture, so Satsuki figures it couldn't have been taken that long ago. The cut on her lip is



gone, but her hair is still two-tone. She's wearing a blank tank top beneath a motorcycle jacket and worn ratty jeans with a hole in one knee that end stuffed in boots that looked ready to give out from wear.

"As I said, I cannot allow you to bother Lady Ragyo at this time. You'll have to make an appointment," The clerk says.

"Alright, fine, when's she available?" Ryuko's tone is not pleased in the least.

"Not for a few months, I'm afraid."

"You didn't even check anything!"

Out of the corner of Satsuki's eye she sees Gamagoori make a motion to one of the security guards who nods and begins forward. Realizing that Ryuko is about to be escorted out of the building, Satsuki gets over her surprise and in a few long strides she's at the counter. "I can take it to her."

Ryuko looks to her and Satsuki can feel her pulse quicken. She's only marginally aware that the clerk has stood and is speaking to her in surprise, all of her attention is on Ryuko who looks her up and down in a way that Satsuki is all too familiar with. She doesn't know if she should be on edge or disgusted that she's being checked out by this woman who might or might not be her sister.

"Let me guess," Ryuko says, amusement clear in her voice as she wagged a finger at Satsuki, "Satsuki Kiryuin? Daughter of the big fat cat herself?"

Satsuki frowns at this. Everyone else balks.

"You will watch your tone when addressing Lady Satsuki or Lady Ragyo," Gamagoori's voice echoes in the lobby without interruption. Satsuki realizes that all eyes are on them now, all previous murmur of conversation has died away.

“Relax, big guy,” Ryuko waves a hand and Satsuki is impressed that she does not seem the least bit intimidated by Gamagoori, “It was just a joke.” Her eyes turn back to Satsuki. “You’d do that for me, babe? Deliver my letter?”

Gamagoori looks like he’s about to say something again, Satsuki speaks before him. “I could, yes. Could I ask you what it’s about?”

Ryuko gives a noncommittal shrug, “Just some things that need to be said is all, it’s important though so I just need to make sure she gets it.”

“If you have complaints or suggestions, why haven’t you turned them into our customer service?” Satsuki asks. Again, Ryuko shrugs.

“There ain’t any suggestions and... well it doesn’t really have anything to do with Revocs anyway. You’ll see she gets it?” At that, Ryuko holds out the envelope she’s holding. Satsuki sees that her knuckles and the first joints on her index and middle fingers are scabbed over. Gamagoori reaches for the envelope and Ryuko draws it back to her chest. “Easy big guy, it’s not a bomb or anything.”

If the statement was supposed to be placating, it certainly wasn’t. Gamagoori looked like he was about to have Ryuko throttled. Again, before he could speak, Satsuki extended her hand. Ryuko smiled and held out the envelope, but when Satsuki made to take it from her she held fast. The mirth that was in her eyes was gone now and she fixed Satsuki with a look that she suspected she herself had given before.

“Make sure it gets to Ragyo, yeah?” Satsuki narrows her eyes. She distinctly does not like to be given orders, but these are extenuating circumstances. Eventually she gives a stiff nod and Ryuko lets go of the envelope. All at once the humor is back in her expression and she smiles lazily to the clerk. “There. Was that so hard?”

With that the room watched as Ryuko Matoi turned on her heel and walked out of the lobby. Gradually the murmurs began to start up again, though many eyes still flitted to Satsuki, while she herself only had eyes on the envelope in her hand. It was smaller than she had first thought it was, maybe a 6x9 in classic contour flap style. She squeezed it between her fingers and felt only paper inside.

“Lady Satsuki, do you know who that was?” Gamagoori asked quietly, eyeing the envelope like it was a live viper.

She paused as she looked again to the doors that led out of the lobby and to the street beyond. Somewhere she heard the roar of a motorcycle. “No, Gamagoori, I really don’t.”

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The rest of the day the envelope burns a hole in Satsuki’s bag. No matter what she does, it’s constantly in the back of her mind. She wants nothing more than to tear it open and read it, something that Gamagoori had insisted on doing himself to ensure it was worth the Kiryuin’s time, but Satsuki had resisted. Instead, she spent much of her time wondering what prompted this development. Why had Ryuko Matoi sought out her mother? Did she suspect something as well? If so, how did she discover the connection? If she did suspect, why had she not said anything to Satsuki herself? Why attempt to establish contact now? She was financially stable, according to what Satsuki had seen of her bank account anyway.

Eventually the day had passed without much to show for it, and again Satsuki found herself in her private study, sitting on her lounge chair with her book, though she hadn’t been able to concentrate on reading. On top of the closed book sat the letter, daring her to peek within. Like clockwork a knock came at her door, announcing dinner, and Satsuki stood and slipped the envelope into her pocket before making her way to the dining room. Nui was already there when she arrived and seemed distracted by something on her phone and Satsuki sat without a word. It wasn’t long before their mother appeared, her heels clicking as she strode down the hallway to her seat, and when she took it the servants appeared with their first

course. The meal went on like it always did. Ragyo talked about her day and asked about theirs. Nui went on about her studies and Satsuki briefly talked about her own responsibilities before silence fell around them. It was halfway through their main course that Satsuki reached into her pocket and produced the envelope.

“Oh, mother, before I forget. This came for you.” She said, holding the envelope out as casually as she could manage. The silence before had been accommodating, almost comfortable. Now it was suffocating. Ragyo was immediately suspicious, narrowing her eyes at Satsuki. Across the table Nui was looking between them. This was not how mail was delivered, it was sorted by staff and delivered to their private rooms, it always had been.

“Oh?” Ragyo said at last, her voice cool and clipped, “And how did you come by it?”

“It was delivered to Revocs this afternoon,” Satsuki said plainly.

“And it was not left at the front desk?”

“They insisted it be delivered directly to you.”

“Who insisted?”

Satsuki didn't reply. She suspected that Ragyo didn't need her to. Slowly, Ragyo took the envelope from Satsuki's fingers and turned it over in her hands. There was no address and no name to be seen. The stationary was simple and plain. She picked up a knife from the table to cut along the top of the envelope before reaching in and withdrawing papers that had been folded in half before setting the empty envelope aside. Satsuki and Nui both watched in silence as Ragyo unfolded the papers and began to read.

When the papers were held together, they were opaque enough that Satsuki couldn't see through them to discern what was written on the pages, even when her mother would eventually separate them to read the next page, the writing was small and faint enough that she

wouldn't have been able to read it anyway.. Her mother's expression, however, was anything but opaque. Anxiety was plain on Ragyo's face, along with disdain and a naked hurt that nearly made Satsuki regret giving her the letter. By the time she had finished the last page and carefully refolded the papers, her hands were trembling.

"Mama?" Nui asked quietly, "What's wrong?"

Ragyo reached for her wineglass and drank half of it. "Nothing to worry about, dear," She said before turning her gaze to Satsuki. There was anger there, Satsuki had expected that, but also that same regret and hurt from before. Satsuki wanted to apologise, wanted to yell at her, wanted to demand answers, but Ragyo's eyes commanded her to be silent, and like a good daughter, she was.

Finally, Ragyo reached down and picked up the empty envelope before pushing out her chair and standing, letter in one hand, glass of wine in the other.

"It's been a long day," She said in a tone that was nearly robotic, "I think I'm going to retire early. See you tomorrow, girls."

"Goodnight, mama," Nui said as Ragyo turned and walked out of the room, her gait muffled. Satsuki was still watching when she turned the corner, but from the corner of her eye she saw Nui looked to her, anger on her face.

"Suki, what did--" she began but Satsuki made a sharp motion with her hand.

"In the office," She said simply before standing. She quickly made her way out of the dining room and toward her private study, Nui practically stepping on her heels the entire way. She pushed the door open and stepped in, a moment later Nui practically slammed it shut.

"What the hell was that about? What was in that letter?" Nui demanded, her voice louder than Satsuki would have liked but she

ignored it.

"I don't know," She said as she nearly fell into her lounge. She wished she had let Gamagoori read that letter now.

"Who gave it to you?" Nui was at her side, hands on her hips. If she was trying to be intimidating, it was ruined by her bright pink dress.

"Ryuko Matoi. She came to Revocs today," Satsuki said, "She gave me the letter to deliver to mother directly."

Nui was silent long enough that Satsuki looked up at her. The anger was almost gone, replaced by surprise. "Ryuko was there? And you did it?"

"I had hoped it would prompt her to tell us about what happened," Satsuki said. The anger was back in Nui's eyes.

"Well that obviously didn't fucking happen, did it?"

"Language."

"Oh fuck off, you deserve it," Nui growled, "I've never seen mama that upset before. Whatever she wrote it was bad."

"I could tell that," Satsuki sighed. Their words fell away for a moment before Nui folded her arms.

"So what now, Suki? Waiting doesn't seem like it's going to work at this point," She said at last.

Satsuki wet her lips as she went over her options, but no matter how often she rolled them around in her mind, she came back to the same conclusion.

"What are you doing tomorrow?" She asked, meeting Nui's gaze. Nui frowned.

"Homework, why?"

“I have Ryuko’s work address,” Satsuki said. She neglected to mention she had known it for the past month. Nui’s eyes widened. “What do you say we pay her a visit ourselves?”

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The drive to the shop the next day would have been silent if not for the radio that played between them. Ever since the letter, Nui had seemed less eager to meet the mysterious Matoi but still curious enough to tag along. They were in Satsuki’s white sedan, Soroi had offered to drive them of course but Satsuki had turned him down insisting that she felt like spending the day alone with her sister. He had been kind enough not to point out the lie, Satsuki and Nui were more friendly than they had been in the past, but they rarely ever spent hours at a time together when they didn’t have to.

The first time they had drove right past the place and had to circle the block before coming back. It was a small shop with room enough for four cars to be serviced at a time and shared a lot with a nearby bar. At the side of the building was what looked like a small lobby that served as a waiting area for customers though at the moment it was empty. Satsuki parked in front and stared at the shop for a long time before resolving herself and opening her door. Nui had apparently been waiting for her as she did the same shortly after. Together they walked to the open garage doors looking around at the few people they saw as they approached. The uniform seemed to be made up of blue coveralls and black gloves. Currently there were two cars being worked on and three employees visible, none of which looked like Matoi. Satsuki hoped that she was working today. As they got close, one of the employees pulled away from inside the garage to meet them halfway. He was middle aged and stocky with dark hair and a patch of fuzz on his chin that served as a beard.

“Morning, ladies,” He called, “Welcome to Hayato’s Auto” He pointed to the left side of his chest where a name was printed on his uniform. “I’m Hayato. Anything I can help you with?”

“I hope so,” Satsuki said, offering him a polite smile, “We’re here to see a one Ryuko Matoi. We believe that she works here?”

Hayato continued to smile but the warmth was gone from it, he nodded a bit at her request. "Can I ask as to what this is about?"

"Nothing serious," Satsuki said, "She was recommended to us by a friend and we'd like to get her opinion on something, that's all."

The man regarded then and shrugged and the warmth was back in his eyes. "Yeah, sure, one second." He turned then and cleared his throat before shouting into the garage, "Hey, Matoi!"

"What?" bellowed the reply at the same volume.

"Customers here for you!" He turned and smiled to Satsuki. "She'll be out in a second." and with that he returned to join the previous workers.

It took another minute or two before Ryuko appeared from around a corner further in the shop. She was wearing the same coveralls as the other workers and was working an oil-stained rag in her hands as she walked forward. When she looked up and finally saw them she stopped, surprise evident on her face before it faded into a grin. She seemed to be deciding something to herself before shrugging a shoulder and walking forward, jamming the dirty rag into her back pocket.

"Morning, ladies," She said as she looked from Satsuki to Nui. Satsuki noted that she didn't look Nui up and down nearly as long as she did to her the day before. "I don't suppose you're here for business, are you?"

"We would like to speak with you privately, if you don't mind," Satsuki said coolly. Ryuko sucked her teeth for a moment before twisting to look at a clock that was hanging on a nearby wall. She nodded to herself before turning back to face them. "Yeah, give me a minute."

She didn't wait to see Satsuki nod before she turned to go back into the shop, shouting as she did. "Hayato! I'm taking my lunch!"



There seemed to be some back and forth about this, but Satsuki ignored it as she watched Ryuko disappear around the corner again. Beside her Nui was a bundle of nervous energy as she fidgeted with the skirt of her dress, this close to what had been a month long question mark and now eager for some answers. They waited in silence for another moment before Ryuko reappeared with a paper bag and with a jerk of her thumb, directed them to the side of the building. While the front had been bright and eye-catching, the side of the garage was plain grey stone with a five-step stairway that led to what must have been an employee entrance to the garage. Ryuko sat herself on the steps with a sigh and reached into the paper bag, producing a bento box and a can of cheap beer which she cracked open and took a long pull from.

“So,” She said at last, grinning at them in a way that showed off plenty of teeth, “Judging from the looks on your faces, I’m gonna guess that you delivered my letter.”

“What the hell did you put in that letter?” Nui demanded, “Mama was--” Satsuki grasped Nui’s elbow lightly to cut her off before speaking further.

“I did,” She said, her voice plain and her expression carefully constructed to show nothing.

Ryuko nodded, taking another drink of beer. “Thanks, that means a lot to me, it really does. So how did ‘mama’ take it, pigtails?”

Satsuki squeezed Nui’s elbow to will her to be silent. She was suddenly worried it might not have been a good idea to bring the girl along. Satsuki answered before she could, “She was upset.”

“Ah, shame,” Ryuko nodded, scratching at the back of her neck, “Well as for what was written in it, I mean I never wrote a letter before y’know? I actually looked up stuff like what to say and how to start, shit like that. A lot of sites gave really good examples, but they all agreed that you should write what seems appropriate for the

person you're writing it to. So I really thought about it and I wrote: 'Dear cunt.'"

Nui lunged forward and Satsuki was glad she had the forethought to have grabbed her by the elbow. Even so, Nui nearly wrenched her way free before Satsuki managed to pull her back and hissed at her to stay calm before looking back to scowl at Ryuko. The grin was back and she took another long drink of beer.

"Enough. How much do you know, Matoi?" Satsuki demanded. Ryuko raised her brows before shrugging.

"Eh, probably about as much as you I guess," She said before smiling, "I saw it in your eyes when we were in the lobby. You knew exactly who I was the moment you saw me. Am I everything you expected?"

"Disappointing and more," Nui growled.

"That stings, pigtails," Ryuko put a hand to her chest in mock hurt, "But now I'm curious. How long have you known?"

Satsuki considers but sees no reason to lie. "A month."

"Only? Huh, guess I'm not big news around the Kiryuin estate."

"And you? How long have you known?"

"Starting putting it together since I was sixteen," she said, leaning on one elbow propped up against the step behind her, "the matron at my orphanage gave me a letter from a bank that had a nice shiny card in it. Only the letter doesn't say 'Ms. Matoi' on it like the card does, it says 'Ms. Kiryuin'. I figured they screwed up, so I might as well take advantage of the situation and withdraw as much money as I could at once. Let me tell you, that was some fun couple of days. So I wait for the hammer to fall, but it never does. I figure, hell, if they're gonna take their time with it I might as well enjoy myself and go to take out some more money, only this time there's a restriction

on the account, and now there's a weekly allotment. That strikes me as very odd, y'know? Someone was keeping tabs on the account enough to see me withdraw all that money, but instead of reporting it, they restrict it down to a weekly allowance?

“So it bugs me enough that I finally track down a branch of the bank that the card came from and it takes for-fuckin’-ever for them to even talk to me, I have to show them the card and my student id before they even let me look at the account and lo and behold, all that money is under my name. I ask around and it turns out the account started sometime around the time I was born and someone’s been putting money in it every month, but since I was a minor I wasn’t actually in charge of it, there's a stewardship or something watching over the account. I ask who that is and suddenly nobody knows how to look up that information, start saying shit about privacy and all that. Now a while’s gone by at this point and it had slipped my head, so I’m wracking my brain as I get out of this bank and suddenly I remember. ‘Ms. Kiryuin’. Next day I go to the school computer lab and look up that name and there she is, looking me right in the face: Ragyo Kiryuin. Now imagine my surprise when I’m looking through pictures of the smiling troll and I see my spitting image sitting on her lap on some magazine cover from thirteen years earlier, only according to the magazine cover it ain’t me.” Ryuko smiles a humorless smile as she points to Satsuki. “It’s you. ‘Inside the home of Ragyo and Satsuki Kiryuin.’

“After that it's the little things. Whenever I need to go to the hospital for stitches or I go to lockup, suddenly everything's paid for and I’m free to go, but whenever I ask why everyone’s mum on the subject. Once I get in a brawl so bad my spleen is ruptured and I’m rushed to the ER. Come to find out later Ragyo delayed a business trip at the exact same day I’m admitted and doesn’t leave until after I’m nearly released from the hospital, once again free of charge. Suddenly I go missing from the orphanage and just as suddenly Ragyo schedule clears up until I’m found again. And every year like clockwork I look your ass up, and every year all I can think about is ‘damn, it’s like lookin’ into a fuckin’ mirror’”

Silence falls across the three of them as Ryuko finishes off her beer and belches before crushing the can. As Satsuki processes the information she watches the other woman open the bento box and began tucking in with fervor.

“So why now?” She finally asks, “Why come forward now?”

Ryuko shrugs as she swallows her meal. “I thought about coming forward for a long time. Had little dramas in my head of charging into the Revocs building or that big fuck-off house of yours and demanding to see the bitch, thought about what I’d say to her, how I’d give anything to pop her one right in her goddamn mouth, but y’know, shit got in the way. It was obvious she didn’t want anything to do with me, so I figured, why should I spend so much time and effort on her when she didn’t give a damn for me? Then I met the Mankanshoku’s.”

“The who?” Nui asked, her tone clipped.

“Not like I expected you to know ‘em,” Ryuko grunts around a mouthful, “They’re a family, nicest people I ever met. Took me off the street when I was seventeen and treated me like I was their own, no questions, no judgement. I stay with them, help out at their clinic for a bit before we figure desk work ain’t really my thing. Instead they have this old truck and it’s been having engine trouble for a while, and I was pretty good in shop class, so I offer to take a look and I’m a damned natural. Two years later me and Mako move here so she can go to school and I start working in this dump.”

“That doesn’t explain the sudden contact, though,” Satsuki presses.

“I’m getting to it, keep your designer pants on. Up until that point I resolved to have nothing to do with that Ragyo bitch, but the Mankanshoku’s, they don’t have a lot of money and Mako’s trying to become a nurse or a doctor or something, shit that requires years of school and all these books and there’s no way they can pay for it all. One day we’re watching TV together and a Revocs commercial

comes on and suddenly I know exactly where we can get the money for Mako's college fund."

"Money?" Nui barks, "This is all about money?"

"You're damn right it is," Ryuko's sly smile is gone now, replaced with a glare as she leans forward, resting her arms on her knees, "Money might not buy happiness but it can get you started on the path to it. You two have never wanted for anything in your entire goddamn lives, you don't know the first fucking thing to being so damn hungry it hurts, or weighing sleeping on a park bench or under an overpass. It ain't for me, I don't want a goddamn thing from that bitch. I'm doing just fine on my own. I know I'm a fuck up, but Mako? She's gonna be somebody by the time she's done, she's gonna be important, and the Mankanshoku's deserve a helluva lot more than what they got. So I decided it was time to make some demands and get some shit off my chest while I was at it."

"And what were your demands?" Satsuki asks

"I want the restriction on my bank account removed, and I want my full cut of the Kiryuin fortune."

"And if she refuses?"

"Then I'm going public, baby," Ryuko grins, "Ragyo Kiryuin's secret bastard daughter demands fortune. Read her storied past in all it's lurid details. Blood tests confirm lineage. Sounds good, don't it? It's a win-win for me, she either does what I ask, or public pressure makes her."

"You've thought this through," Satsuki hums.

"What can I say? Must run in the family," Ryuko grins as she stuffs the beer can and bento box back in the paper bag at her feet before reaching into her pocket to take out a battered flip phone, checking the cracked screen. "Sorry to say, ladies, but our time is up. I got to get back to work."

Neither Satsuki nor Nui attempt to stop her as Ryuko stands, stretches and moves to walk past them, but before she does she stops just beside and to the front of Satsuki and speaks in a low voice.

“You know what the opposite of love is, Kiryuin? See, people think it’s hate, but nah. It’s apathy. ‘I don’t care about you’ is so much worse then ‘I hate you’ because it says you’re not even worth hating. So when I call your mom a bitch and you get that look in your eye like ‘yeah she is,’ don’t you think for a fucking minute we’re on the same page. In the end, she gave a shit about you, and me? She put me on a doorstep and walked away. So what does that tell you?”

Their shoulders knocked together as Ryuko passed and Satsuki had to will herself not to throw the woman to the ground. Moments pass as her and Nui stand there at the side of the building in silence before Nui pulls at her arm.

“You can let go of me now,” She says. Satsuki spares her a glance before relinquishing her elbow. There are white marks in the shape of Satsuki’s fingers in Nui’s skin.

“Let’s go home,” Satsuki says plainly, turning to walk back to the sedan.

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The drive back to the manor is less quiet then it had previously been. Nui is practically seething and is all too eager to try and get Satsuki’s opinion of Ryuko Matoi and figure out how they could make her regret her words and actions. Satsuki doesn’t give in to her prodding, and it’s surprisingly easy to have Nui promise her silence on the subject until they can come up with a more concrete plan.

By the time they make it home it’s lunchtime and Satsuki asks to have it delivered to her study, though she’s not all together very hungry. She sits at her desk in front of her laptop intending to do work, but after a while of staring at the blank screen in front of her

she realises that she wouldn't be able to devote her full concentration as she would like.

Inmouta had found almost no online presence of Ryuko Matoi, nothing that could be traced back to her name at least. Now, however, Satsuki had more names to commit to another search. It takes her longer than she expected to find the person she's looking for--there's a small number of 'Mako Mankanshoku's' in the world it seems--before she finds a social media account for the one she's looking for. Her system had been to find a page and go through any photos that had been posted to the accounts in an attempt to find Matoi, but when she clicked on this specific Mako's profile, part of Ryuko's face and two-tone hair was right there in her avatar image, a picture that looked like it had been taken from a cropped selfie.

Delving further into the account, Satsuki finds posts mostly revolving around food and school along with cheerful memes and reposts. Finding little of interest, she turns her attention to Mako's photo albums. The girl seems to have no sense of organization, but it doesn't take Satsuki long to find the images she's looking for. Ryuko seems to be a common subject for Mako's photography as there's a good deal of candid photos featuring her in various settings, squatting next to a motorcycle with tools splayed out beside her, in the middle of slurping up noodles in an udon restaurant, asleep on a couch with a black cat curled up on her chest. Mako seems to enjoy adding commentary to the photos as well, one photo is of Ryuko in what looked like a bar and reaching for the camera with an exasperated look on her face while a woman standing a bit behind her looks on in amusement. Beneath this one was the sentence: 'She said i was cramping her style lol'

There are a number of staged photos as well, Ryuko and Mako angling themselves in such a way as to give the impression of holding up monuments behind them, a picture inside a salon of Ryuko with foil in her hair, selfies with peace signs and bright smiles. There was no trace of the sly and vindictive Ryuko Matoi that Satsuki

had talked to hours before. The one she was looking at now smiled easily and kindly with eyes the color of the sea on a calm day.

Going back to the front page of Mako's account, Satsuki quickly found another that peaked her interest. A joint account for 'Barazou and Sukuyo Mankanshoku'. Clicking on that brought her to another page, and again she went into the photo albums which were slightly more organized than Mako's had been and it doesn't take her long to find pictures of Ryuko. She's never alone in these images, either with Mako or another member of the Mankanshoku clan, and in every one of them she's smiling in that same easy way. Eventually her search brings her to the last image, possibly the first one that Ryuko appeared in. It seems to have been taken during the holidays some years before. Ryuko is sitting in between Mako and a younger boy whose smile shows off missing teeth and is wearing a bright red and green sweater that's slightly too big for her. She's thin, her wild hair is all black, there's a yellow splotch on her jaw where a bruise was in the process of fading, and while her eyes look weary and tired, her smile is still there.

Satsuki finds herself staring at this image for a long time. There's no date on the picture itself, and yet she wonders what she was doing at the time this picture was taken. Ryuko had said she was seventeen when the Mankanshoku's took her in and that seemed to match the age she guessed that Ryuko was in the picture. Satsuki had probably been on break from school at that point and busying herself with study and work as holidays had never been big events in the Kiryuin household. She wondered if that would have been different if Ryuko had been there. True Satsuki and Nui had always been at odds, but Satsuki and Ryuko had been so close in age would they have also been repelled from each other?

Satsuki pulled herself from her thoughts before they could begin spiralling away from her and reached for her phone. She briefly scrolled through her contacts before tapping the one she wanted and bringing it to her ear. As always, it was answered on the second ring.



“Inmouta, I’m sending you a social media profile for one Mako Mankanshoku,” She said, “I’d appreciate it if you could discover her current address for me.”